

# *What the Day of Silence Is Really All About*

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*What's the Day of Silence all about—and how can you respond?*

On April 17, thousands of American students—some as young as 12—will participate in a "Day of Silence." They will refuse to utter a single word, not even in response to a teacher's question, in recognition of so-called discrimination and harassment—the silencing—experienced by gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. These silent protesters will wear special T-shirts and hand out "speaking cards" explaining their concerns. Many schools will also host follow-up events, called "Breaking the Silence," which include workshops, speakers, and entertainment—all meant to reinforce the message that "homophobia" will not be tolerated. Here's what you need to know about the event, and how to respond to it.

## **What's it really about?**

First of all, it's important to understand that the Day of Silence is organized by a national homosexual activist group—the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)—which also encourages the formation of pro-gay student clubs (Gay/Straight Alliances) in schools across the country.

GLSEN's Day of Silence began in 1996 with some 150 participants at one university. Today, GLSEN claims that more than 500,000 students participate in this event in thousands of schools, colleges and universities across the nation. Students are encouraged to wear Day of Silence T-shirts and pass out cards that proclaim they are a part of a "national youth movement bringing attention to the silence faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and their allies."

One controversial aspect of this event is that Day of Silence organizers ask students to refuse to speak during classroom time, directly interfering with public schools' mandated instruction schedule—which as we all know, is already crunched for time just to cover the academic basics.

So at its heart the Day of Silence is an adult-driven campaign that is selfishly done for primarily political reasons, even though well-meaning students may decide to participate.

## **Why should we be concerned?**

GLSEN claims this event is about tolerance and safety. But if you pay close attention to the messages being communicated, it's clear that tolerance exists only for one viewpoint—complete acceptance of homosexuality as normal and worthy of being embraced. Anyone who doesn't agree with that message is cast as bigoted and ignorant.

Of course, that one-sided presentation puts students with deeply held religious convictions in danger of having their beliefs discriminated against, or worse, ridiculed. It may also cause students who struggle with unwanted same-sex attraction to feel hopeless—because they are not given an opportunity to hear the perspective of people who say it's possible to change if you want to do so.

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What's frightening about all this is the fact that events like the Day of Silence appear to have a role in shaping students' views of homosexuality.

- According to Zogby polls, the majority of high school seniors now favor legal recognition of same-sex relationships.
- In 2007, *USA Today* reported that "Gay teenagers are 'coming out' earlier than ever ... The change is happening in the wake of opinion polls that show growing acceptance of gays ...."
- Polls also show that a large majority of students support gay adoption.

Another problem with events that celebrate homosexual behavior is that they do not tell students the whole story. Any sexual behavior among unmarried young people is risky, especially homosexual behavior. For instance, data from cities across the U.S. indicate that rates for diseases like syphilis<sup>1</sup>, gonorrhea<sup>2</sup>, hepatitis and human papilloma virus are consistently – and disproportionately – high among gay men<sup>3</sup>. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also reveal that the vast majority – approximately 70 percent – of cases of HIV transmission are through male homosexual activity<sup>4</sup>. And young men seem to be especially at risk, with groups like the American Foundation for AIDS Research stating that at least half of new HIV infections annually are among people under age 25.<sup>5</sup>

And despite nearly a quarter-century of "safe sex" education efforts undertaken in large measure by the gay activist community and its allies in the medical professions, new HIV infections are occurring at an estimated rate of 55,000 to 60,000 a year.<sup>6</sup>

So it's irresponsible for public schools to allow students to be pushed by outside national groups to embrace a sexual lifestyle. They should at least allow students to make informed decisions by letting them hear both sides of the story.

## **How should we respond?**

When people find out that a Day of Silence is being celebrated in their school, they may wonder how to respond in a way that expresses both truth and love. The good news is that there is an alternative: The Day of Truth, which was established by the Alliance Defense Fund in 2005, equips students of faith with a winsome and compassionate way to express their viewpoint. "In the past, students who have attempted to speak against the promotion of the homosexual agenda have been censored or, in some cases, punished for their beliefs. It is important that students stand up for their First Amendment right to hear and speak the Truth about human sexuality in order to protect that freedom for future generations. The Day of Truth provides an opportunity to publicly exercise your constitutional right to free speech," explains the Web Site ([www.dayoftruth.org](http://www.dayoftruth.org)).

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This year, the Day of Truth is being celebrated on April 20 (the Monday immediately after GLSEN's Day of Silence). Participating students are encouraged to wear T-shirts and pass out cards (not during class time) with the following message:

*I'm speaking the Truth to break the silence.*

*True tolerance means that people with differing—even opposing—viewpoints can freely exchange ideas and respectfully listen to each other.*

*It's time for an honest conversation about homosexuality.*

*There's freedom to change if you want to.*

*Let's talk.*

In contrast to the Day of Silence, the Day of Truth encourages dialogue. And while the Day of Silence campaign disrupts classes and is divisive—pitting students against "intolerant" parents, relatives, peers, teachers, administrators, and community members—the Day of Truth does not disrupt classes or other activities and is meant to strengthen families. It is an opportunity to speak God's uncompromising truth in love and compassion.

## **How we can have the most impact?**

First of all, it's important to be respectful to students, teachers and principals, no matter how rude the responses of others may be to your message. It's also important to follow procedure. Pass out Day of Truth cards *only* during breaks, lunch hours or before and after school. *Do not* pass out cards during class time. It's a good idea to check into your school's policy on literature distribution beforehand—you may need to get permission to pass out the Day of Truth cards and put up posters. Don't purposefully break the rules.

At the same time, it's important to be aware of your legal rights. When schools open their doors to events advocating homosexual behavior like the Day of Silence—and then turn around and censor student-led events like the Day of Truth—that's a classic case of viewpoint discrimination. If schools are opening their doors to the Day of Silence, then students with deeply held religious convictions can make the case that their views should equally be respected—and also be given a place at the table. The bottom line is that freedom of speech should apply to everyone, not just selected groups of students.

Some people may falsely accuse Day of Truth participants of wanting to discriminate. Students who face those comments can calmly respond by explaining that they do not desire to hurt anyone and are opposed to any form of harassment against anyone—no matter who they are. At the same time, students of faith have the right to politely request that they in turn be given equal time and respect for their viewpoints, without facing harassment or censorship.

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The good news is that students across the country are standing up for those rights—and they are succeeding. For example, in 2006, Benjamin Arthurs, a student at Midway High School in North Carolina, was suspended from school for distributing materials outside of class time during the Day of Truth event—even though students participating in the Day of Silence were permitted to observe that event. Arthurs sought help from the Alliance Defense Fund and won a settlement that made the school revise its unconstitutional policies prohibiting religious speech, events and T-shirts. The suspension was expunged from his record.

We hope the Day of Truth will equip more students like Arthurs to tell the "rest of the story" and express their First Amendment rights. If you are a student and want to participate, be sure to visit the Day of Truth ([www.dayoftruth.org](http://www.dayoftruth.org)) to register.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.cdc.gov/std/Syphilis2006/Syphilis2006Short.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/std/Syphilis2006/Syphilis2006Short.pdf), p.1; See also Tom Paulson, 'Syphilis Hits More Gays and Bisexuals: King County Cases Double' Drug Abuse, HIV Might Have Role, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, May 19, 2005; See also Gay Men Fueling Rising Syphilis Rates in U.S., Federal Health Officials Say, Southern Voice, November 9, 2005; See also Price, Joyce Howard, Homosexual Men Boost Increase in Syphilis Rate, Washington Times, March 17, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> [www.cdc.gov/std/GISP2005/GISPSurvSupp2005short.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/std/GISP2005/GISPSurvSupp2005short.pdf), figure 8 (p. 20) and figure 9 (p. 21); See also Gay Men Fueling Rising Syphilis Rates in U.S., Federal Health Officials Say, Southern Voice, November 9, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> [www.fda.gov/Cber/faq/msmdonor.htm](http://www.fda.gov/Cber/faq/msmdonor.htm)

<sup>4</sup> [www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/surveillance/resources/slides/general/slides/general.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/surveillance/resources/slides/general/slides/general.pdf), see slide #4 in particular. See also Centers for Disease Control, HIV/AIDS and Men Who Have Sex With Men (MSM), revised June 2007 ([www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/msm/resources/factsheets/msm.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/msm/resources/factsheets/msm.htm)).

<sup>5</sup> American Foundation for AIDS Research, Fundraising Mailer and Petitions to Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert and Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> [www.southernvoice.com/thelatest/thelatest.cfm?blog\\_id=17431](http://www.southernvoice.com/thelatest/thelatest.cfm?blog_id=17431); See also [www.nytimes.com/2008/01/02/nyregion/02hiv.html?hp](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/02/nyregion/02hiv.html?hp); See also Brown, David, Estimate of AIDS Cases In U.S. Rises: New Test Places the Rate of Infection 50% Higher, Washington Post, December 1, 2007 ([http://www.washingtonpost.com:80/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/11/30/AR2007113002535\\_pf.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com:80/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/11/30/AR2007113002535_pf.html)); See also Lou Chibbaro, Jr., Gov't to Report Alarming Spike in HIV: CDC Numbers May Be 50 Percent Higher Than Originally Thought, Washington Blade, November 14, 2007 ([www.washblade.com/thelatest/thelatest.cfm?blog\\_id=15241](http://www.washblade.com/thelatest/thelatest.cfm?blog_id=15241)).